

Rocky Faith (4): Confession In Despair

John 6:53-71

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*Get up, God! Are you going to sleep all day?
Wake up! Don't you care what happens to us?
Why do you bury your face in the pillow?
Why pretend things are just fine with us?
And here we are—flat on our faces in the dirt...
Get up and come to our rescue.
If you love us so much, help us!*

Does that sound like a provocative prayer? Perhaps even blasphemous?
Accusing God of sleeping on the job.... really?

These are words from a poem written by some worship leaders.

“OK” – you say.

“May sure we don't end up at THEIR church!

What a negative bunch they are.”

Actually, the writers are worship leaders out of a whole clan of worship leaders.

Worship leaders for generations in.....

Do you know what church?

You've probably heard of it.....

....in.....

....the Temple.

They were from the clan of Korah - a couple of verses of Scripture:

Psalms 44:23-24 – the header in the bible says, “*Of the sons of Korah.*”

Written in a time of great pain, and deep disappointment with God.

Maybe you are saying, *'Wish I'd heard those words before. I'd have wanted to pray them.'*

Maybe you still do – if you feel like praying at all.

Disappointment with God.

Feeling despair – and wondering why God doesn't rescue you from it.

As a congregation, we've had our share of occasions in the past year or so where some might say, “*You must be disappointed with God.*”

- Accidental death in the middle of a vigorous, happy life
- still birth on the cusp of delivery
- unexpected job shakeup or loss
- shocking news from the doctor

*Get up, God! Are you going to sleep all day?
Wake up! Don't you care what happens to us?...*

Does that not, perhaps, seem appropriate?

We're in a series called “*Rocky Faith*”, where we've strapped a GoPro camera, so to speak, to the life of Simon, one of the closest friends of Jesus.

Simon – the guy given the nickname “*Rocky*” by Jesus.

Perhaps because of his rock-solid faith.

Or was it because of his rocky, unstable faith.

Today we're going to share an experience in Simon's life where he, and pretty much everyone around him, was wrestling with disappointment in Jesus.

What did they do with that disappointment?

And what might we learn from it?

Please take your bibles, and open them to **John 6:53-71, p.1035**

I'd also invite you to reach for the study guide, the yellow insert in the bulletin – where you can jot down some notes.... You'll find a space for questions or comments on the bottom. If something twigs while I'm speaking, feel free to write it there, tear it off and drop it in the offering plate after the message. Deacon Dave and his minions will fish it out, and we'll think about it together.

Before we read – let's pray.....

*Calm us now, O Lord, into a quietness that heals and listens.
Open wounded hearts to the healing medicine of your Word.
Holy Spirit – move within us, that today we might meet
the living, eternal, and loving Saviour.
Through whom we pray, Amen.*

Let's read.....

John 6:53-71, p.1035

Word about Jesus had gone far and wide. John earlier records him feeding a crowd of over 5000. And the people get excited. For generations they'd been conditioned by their teachers to expect a Messiah who would care for all their needs and remove all their suffering with a triumphant victory over intruding political enemies.

Now here comes Jesus. Teaching in a community very close to where he was raised as a child. People knew him. They knew his family.

And he was making grand claims about coming from heaven – about his very person being the way to eternal life. About being sent by God the Father. About people needing to take in his very flesh and blood – almost cannibalistic; surely a metaphor – rabbis always taught with these. But flesh and blood meaning that his life will be sacrificed, and they will have to somehow share the experience of his sacrifice in order to live forever.

It is TOTALLY wierd – WAAAAYYYYYYYY off from what they've been expecting!

Then, to top it off, Jesus gets right in their face about some of them not believing him, and about faith being a challenging thing that only God can bring to life.

It is all too much.

It is a grand disappointment.

And many of Jesus' disciples say, "*Enough!*" and walk away from Jesus.

Then Jesus turns to his closest friends and says, in effect, "*Well? You, too?*"

The response comes from Simon, spokesman for the twelve.

It is his confession of faith.

But it is hardly a happy confession.

It is more a confession in despair – made with gritted teeth, and perhaps a shrug of the shoulders.....

.....what other choice do we have, Jesus?

To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.....

If they could have seen another option, Simon and the boys might have left too.

But, somehow, they realize that this Jesus offers way more than the food he'd just doled out to the crowd of 5000.

You might not realize it right away, but if you read John's gospel carefully you'll see that this account is a tipping point. After this the tone of the gospel changes. Things become dangerous. Death hangs in the air. The disciples sense that this may not end so well.

This is HARD.

Who can accept it?

Jesus isn't what we expected him to be.

He doesn't say what we thought he would.

He doesn't do what we'd hoped he might.

The disciples and Simon struggled with that.

As do we.

And we are forced, like every disciple, beginning with Simon,
to make a choice.

Jesus looks at us and says,

"Well? You, too? Also leaving?"

When the hard moments come in our lives do we look at Jesus through our dashed expectations? Does the bitterness settle in because it didn't turn out like we wanted?

Or are we willing clutch on to Jesus with, as Michael Card puts it in "The Fragile Stone", the last fading shreds of faith we can muster; knowing there's no other place that's safe or sure to which we can go.... knowing that in the eternal scheme of things, being near him is where we need to be?

We can leave, you know.

Many have.

Others will.

Dashed expectations can lead to confusion.
Confusion can lead to bitterness.
And bitterness can lead to abandonment.
Just walk away.

What about you – wonders Jesus.
“*You do not want to leave too, do you?*”

What will you do when your season of disappointment hits?
For, yes, it will happen to everyone, somewhere along the way!
If it hasn't already, it will. Perhaps sooner than you think.
And what are you going to do with it?

When you wrestle with disappointment, please don't feel you need to hide it.
And if someone you know in this church is fighting a deep sense of feeling let-down by God,
don't give them a talking-to, calling them to “*shape up and snap out of it.*”

Understand that you are in very good company.
You are surrounded, to steal a Bible phrase, by a great cloud of witnesses who know the
sort of thing you're experiencing:

Moses (Exodus 5:22-23)
Abraham (Genesis 18:25)
Jonah (Jonah 4:1-2)
Habakuk (Habakkuk 1:2-3)
Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:7-9)
John the Baptist (Matthew 11:3)
...to name a few...

Take John the Baptist.

He'd been preaching a strong message calling people to clean up their lives, to
repent and believe. He'd warned of God's wrath. He'd proclaimed the coming of Messiah.
He'd pointed to Jesus as that Messiah. Then he gets thrown in prison. And perhaps he
could already feel that he'd never come out again. He sends friends to Jesus with a
question, “*Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?*” (Matt.
11:3).

Exactly what brought him to this tipping point, we're not sure. Maybe a combination
of things. Isn't that often how it goes? We can stand up in faith when one hard thing
strikes. Keep walking when there are two things. But when they come, one after another....
we begin to stagger and slip in our obedience and faith.

John was in prison. But he was used to suffering, having lived in the desert. His
followers were migrating to Jesus. And then.... well, then there was what Jesus was doing.
John had been preaching thunder and brimstone – *repent, or else.... you brood of vipers!*
(e.g. Luke 3:7-9; Matt. 3:7-12).

But Jesus? Jesus was roaming the hills of Galilee, preaching the gospel and healing
the sick. Hardly fire and damnation!

John expected one thing. Jesus was doing, apparently, another.

Failed expectation lies at the heart of most every disappointment.

For the crowds in John chapter 6.

For John the Baptist.

And, maybe, for you and me?

We expect one thing and get something else:

We expect beef for dinner and get chicken.

We thought we'd get a tax refund, and we end up owing money.

The weather report promised sunshine for the long weekend, but it rains.

Failed expectation leads to disappointment.

Happens all the time.

The bigger our expectation, the deeper the disappointment.

When there's someone you thought you could trust, who ends up talking behind your back...

Or the employer you thought for sure would keep you on, ends up being not so dependable...

Or you catch your spouse flirting with someone else...

Or dear God.... we know people will let us down.

But NOT God....

Not him, too!

There is no shadow of turning with him. That's what the hymn says.

He is reliable.

N'est pas?

See.... and here we run into trouble.

A writer whose name escapes me right now – and apologies to him -

said recently that we run into trouble because we confuse, as did the people milling around with Simon & the boys, and Abraham, and so many others -

we confuse **reliability** with **predictability**.

This person suggested that we figure that if God is **reliable** we should be able to figure out and **predict** what he's going to do in a particular situation and in our particular moment of life.

With our limited, earth-bound minds we know what we want, and so we put it in the mouth of God. We begin to think that's what he wants for us, too.

Sometimes it works out. Our goals actually align with what God intends. When that happens, we can become so encouraged that we set more goals for God.

But sooner or later—and probably sooner rather than later—what God does is so at odds with our expectation that we hardly know what to think.

We pray for healing and face death instead.

The job that seemed so perfect goes to someone else.

That person who would have been the ideal spouse chooses another.

God isn't doing what, it seems, he should do.

Which is OK, and we can suck it up when it's only seems like a minor penalty, a 2 minute infraction on God's part. But what about the stuff that seems to deserve a divine game misconduct?

That's what John the Baptist wrestled with when Jesus healed instead of convicted.

That was the problem of Jonah and Habakkuk when they saw God sparing people who had committed horrible atrocities.

It's what we wrestle with when good people die, and murderous groups like Boko Haram carry on with impunity; when we struggle with infertility while that one over there seems to our bitter minds to pop babies out like candy from a wrapper.

And there is Jesus, who seems to be upsetting and disappointing just about everybody.

The crowds.

And Simon.

Someone once wrote, "Jesus is an equal opportunity disappointment. He disappoints not only the people of Nazareth who drove him out of the synagogue and tried to throw him off a cliff because he wouldn't perform miracles for them, but also people like those in Korazin and Bethsaida, where he did perform miracles. Jesus disappointed friends and foes alike."

Jesus came for us, but that does not mean that he came to please us. Jesus came for us, but he does not answer to us. He will not subject himself to our agenda, no matter how good that agenda might be.

So, while John the Baptist wrestles in his prison cell with Jesus' aparent lack of vengeful response against sin, Jesus sends back messengers, instructing them,

"Report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Matt 11:4-5).

In effect, Jesus is saying: Tell John that your God has come—that he has come with a vengeance. John, your God has come with a powerful desire to save.... also you.

Jesus responds to Simon, too.

But not on Simon's terms.

In fact, in following chapters the teaching gets even harder.

Because, you see, - while Jesus came for us, he did not come to please us.

Jesus came for us, but he does not answer to us.

He will not subject himself to our agenda, no matter how good that agenda might be.

Instead, Jesus demands that we submit ourselves to his agenda.

Which may be

the hardest thing

we will

EVER

have

to

do.

Is the solution to our disappointment, then, to "suck it up" and "tough it out"?
Or to admit that "life is disappointing" and resolve to "get over it"?

No.

What John the Baptist is called to do, what Simon was called to do, and what you and I are called to do – amidst all the rubble of our hopes and dreams and experiences of fragile lives in this damaged and aching world -

what we are all called to do is to surrender all we have and are to Jesus.

To make our lives totally available - joys and pains – to him.

To open our aching hearts and ask him to completely immerse us in himself.

To pray that he soak us to the point of saturation with the presence of his Holy Spirit.

Otherwise despair will suffocate us.

See, disappointment and despair are such that the tighter we hold on to them, the tighter they will grip us.

The only way to free ourselves is to yield our disappointment and bewilderment and pain to Christ. Ask him to take the shattered pieces of our broken expectations and dreams, and glue them back together into a divinely designed mosaic that reflects his eternal purposes for us.

And hold on in hope – that the divine Grace which saw Jesus through both cross and grave to the final victory of Resurrection will also see us through -

- through this life of suffering,

-down to the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death,

- and finally out --- SAFELY ---- into Eternal Life with our Risen Lord.

It really is so

And it really is hard.

But there really is no other way.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

YOU.....

.....have the words of eternal life.